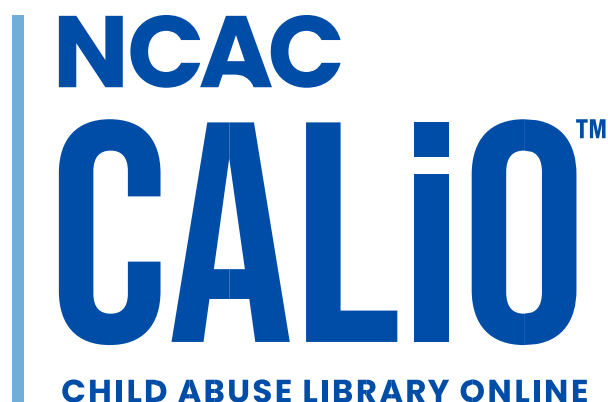




Social Support in Forensic Interviews of Children

A Bibliography

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**Championing and Strengthening the
Global Response to Child Abuse**

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Scope

This bibliography lists research publications discussing interviewer social support during child forensic interviews.

Organization

Publications include articles, book chapters, reports, and research briefs and are arranged in date descending order. Links are provided to full text publications when possible. However, this collection may not be complete. More information can be obtained in the Child Abuse Library Online.

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Social Support in Forensic Interviews of Children

A Bibliography

Talwar, V., Crossman, A. M., Block, S., Brubacher, S., Dianiska, R., Espinosa Becerra, A. K., Goodman, G., Huffman, M. L., Lamb, M. E., London, K., La Rooy, D., Lyon, T. D., Malloy, L. C., Maltby, L., Nguyen Greco, V. P., Powell, M., Quas, J., Rood, C. J., Spyksma, S. D.,& Wylie, B. (2024). [Urgent issues and prospects on investigative interviews with children and adolescents](#). *Legal and Criminological Psychology*. DOI:10.1111/lcrp.12269

While there has been considerable research on investigative interviews with children over the last three decades, there remains much to learn. The aim of this paper was to identify some of the issues and prospects for future scientific study that most urgently need to be addressed. Across 10 commentaries, leading scholars and practitioners highlight areas where additional research is needed on investigative interview practices with youths. Overarching themes include the need for better understanding of rapport-building and its impact, as well as greater focus on social-cultural and developmental factors and the needs of adolescents. There are calls to examine how interviews are occurring in real-world contexts to better inform best practice recommendations in the field, to find means for ensuring better adherence to best practices among various groups of practitioners, and to understand their importance and impact when not followed, including by those testifying in courts. All reflect the need to better address that recurring challenge of reliably and consistently eliciting accurate and credible information from potentially reluctant young witnesses.

Karni-Visel, Y., Hershkowitz, I., Lamb, M. E., & Blasbalg, U. (2023). Nonverbal emotions while disclosing child abuse: The role of interviewer support. *Child Maltreatment*, 28(1), 66-75. DOI:10.1177/10775595211063497

Statements by alleged victims are important when child abuse is prosecuted; triers-of-fact often attend to nonverbal emotional expressions when evaluating those statements.

This study examined the associations among interviewer supportiveness, children's nonverbal emotions, and informativeness during 100 forensic interviews with alleged victims of child abuse. Raters coded the silent videotapes for children's nonverbal emotional expressions while other raters coded the transcripts for interviewer support, children's verbal emotions, and informativeness. Results showed that children's nonverbal signals were more common than and preceded the verbal signs. Interviewer support was associated with children's expressivity. When children expressed more nonverbal emotions, they were more responsive during the pre-substantive phases and more informative about the abuse. Nonverbal emotions partially mediated the association between support and informativeness. The findings underline the value of nonverbal emotional expression during forensic interviews and demonstrate how the interviewers' supportive demeanor can facilitate children's emotional displays and increase informativeness.

Vikander, M., & Strand, S. (2023). [Enhancing domestic violence risk assessments with children's perspectives: Exploring risk, vulnerability and protective factors through forensic interviews](#). *Child & Family Social Work*. DOI:10.1111/cfs.13068

Effective risk management strategies for victims of domestic violence require an adequate risk assessment. While risk assessments for domestic violence typically focus on the adult victim, the risk of children who are exposed to such violence is often overlooked. This study aims to explore what risk, vulnerability and protective factors can be identified through forensic interviews with children exposed to domestic violence. A qualitative latent content analysis was conducted on documented forensic interviews with 41 children. The results show that children reported factors that should be taken into consideration when managing the risk of violence for their mother. In addition, the children's responses suggest the need for a separate risk management plan to address their needs and to protect them from re-victimization. Direct communication with children is crucial to identify factors that are unique to them. These results emphasize the

significance of including their perspective in risk assessments for domestic violence to influence the risk management that includes both mothers and their children.

Karni-Visel, Y., Hershkowitz, I., Lamb, M. E., & Blasbalg, U. (2022). Emotional valence and the types of information provided by children in forensic interviews. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 129, 105639. DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105639

Emotions can powerfully affect memory retrieval although this effect has seldom been studied in everyday contexts. This study aimed to explore the association between children's verbal emotional expressions and the type of information reported during forensic interviews. The sample included 198 interviews with 4- to 14-year-old ($M = 9.36$, $SD = 2.37$) alleged victims of repeated physical abuse perpetrated by family members conducted using the Revised NICHD Protocol which emphasizes a supportive interviewing style. Interview videos were transcribed and each conversational turn was coded to reflect the amount and type of children's verbal emotional expressions, forensic information provided, interviewers' demeanor, and type of question asked. The verbal expression of negative emotions was positively associated with the production of more central details and peripheral details, while the verbal expression of positive emotions was correlated with peripheral details. The verbal expression of negative emotions was associated with the production of more specific details and less generic information whereas positive emotions were associated only with increased specific information. These findings highlight how emotional expression, especially of negative emotions, enhances the quantity and quality of children's reports in forensic contexts.

Chae, Y., Goodman, G. S., Wang, Y., Goodman, M., McWilliams, K., Shaver, P. R., ... & Widaman, K. F. (2021). Parents' attachment orientation, interviewers' support, and children's memory for a mildly distressing event. *Memory*, 29(10), 1384-1395.
DOI:10.1080/09658211.2021.1988644

Parents' attachment orientations predict children's memory about distressing life events, such that parents who are less secure in close relationships tend to have children who are less accurate in their memory reports. This study examined whether socially supportive interviewing would reduce differences in children's memory performance associated with parents' attachment. Children (3 to 5 years, N = 63) and their primary caretakers took part in the Preschool Attachment Classification System (PACS), a moderately distressing event for children of preschool age that is based on the Strange Situation Procedure. Children's memory for the event was then tested shortly thereafter by either a supportive or a non-supportive interviewer. In the non-supportive condition, children whose parents scored higher on attachment avoidance provided lower proportions of correct free recall. However, the association was not significant for children in the supportive condition. In addition, higher parental attachment anxiety predicted lower proportions of correct free recall for children of highly avoidant parents, but not for children of parents lower in attachment avoidance. For direct questions, age differences in proportion correct and proportion incorrect favoured older children. Findings provide insight into interviewing techniques at time of memory retrieval that benefit children of insecure parents.

Hershkowitz, I., Lamb, M. E., Blasbalg, U., & Karni-Visel, Y. (2021). [The dynamics of two session interviews with suspected victims of abuse who are reluctant to make allegations](#). *Development and Psychopathology*, 33(2), 739-747.
DOI:10.1017/S0954579420001820

Supportive forensic interviews conducted in accordance with the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Revised Protocol (RP) help many alleged victims describe abusive experiences. When children remain reluctant to make allegations, the RP guides interviewers to (a) focus on rapport building and nonsuggestive support in a

first interview, and (b) plan a second interview to allow continued rapport building before exploring for possible abuse. We explored the dynamics of such two-session RP interviews. Of 204 children who remained reluctant in an initial interview, we focused on 104 who made allegations when re-interviewed a few days later. A structural equation model revealed that interviewer support during the first session predicted children's cooperation during the rapport-building phase of the second session, which, in turn, predicted more spontaneous allegations, which were associated with the interviewers' enhanced use of open-ended questions. Together, these factors mediated the effects of support on children's free recall of forensically important information. This highlighted the importance of emphasizing rapport with reluctant children, confirming that some children may need more time to build rapport even with supportive interviewers.

Johnston, V., Benedan, L., Brubacher, S., & Powell, M. (2021). The roles of child temperament and interviewer support on children's reports of adult wrongdoing. *Personality and individual differences*, 175, 110732. DOI:10.1016/j.paid.2021.110732

Researchers have demonstrated that interviewer supportive behaviors positively affect children's abilities to provide information about their experiences in many circumstances, but there is some evidence that supportiveness effects may be influenced by children's temperament. The associations among interviewer support, child temperament, and children's propensity to disclose adult transgressions during free recall remain unclear. Children (N = 132) 5 to 9 years old partook in an event where an adult confederate committed six transgressions. The children were interviewed a few days later; half by a supportive interviewer and half by a neutral interviewer. Within two to three months of their participation, the children's teachers completed a questionnaire to describe each child's temperament. While interviewer support did not predict these children's disclosure of transgressions, dimensions of child temperament and individual factors did. Specifically, children's disclosure tendencies were predicted by how socially flexible and task-oriented they were. Additionally, the interviewers' questioning behavior was impacted by children's level of reactivity. Taken together with other research, the results

provide further evidence that behaviors of both the interviewers and the children in the interview process are relevant to facilitating children's disclosures of sensitive information.

Lavoie, J., Wyman, J., Crossman, A. M., & Talwar, V. (2021). Meta-analysis of the effects of two interviewing practices on children's disclosures of sensitive information: Rapport practices and question type. *Child Abuse & Neglect, 113*, 104930. DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.104930

The forensic interview is an important part of the investigative process with child witnesses, and ensuring evidence-based practices is crucial to its success. This meta-analysis examined the overall effect of rapport practices and question type on children's disclosures during forensic interviews to determine (a) how large of an influence existing practices have on children's tendency to disclose information, and (b) how consistent the effect sizes of interviewing practices are across studies, given that inconsistent results have been found. A systematic review of child interviewing practices was conducted, and 35 studies met the inclusion criteria. Articles were categorized thematically according to interviewing practice. Two practices were predominantly represented in the literature and were selected for review and meta-analysis: rapport techniques, including interviewer support, ($n = 9$), and question type ($n = 25$ samples, 23 studies). Random-effects meta-analytic models were computed separately for rapport practices and question type, and moderator analyses were conducted to test for differences according to age and interviewing protocol. Rapport techniques had a medium overall effect on children's disclosures ($d = 0.55, p < .001$), and was moderated by the interviewing protocol used, but not children's age. Open-ended questions compared to closed-ended questions had a medium overall effect on children's descriptions of sensitive events ($d = 0.52, p < .001$), and was not moderated by age or interviewing protocol. These findings provide overarching support for the use of rapport and support, and the use of open-ended questions in forensic interviews with child witnesses.

Nogalska, A., Henderson, H., Cho, S., & Lyon, T. D. (2021). [Police interviewing behaviors and commercially sexually exploited adolescents' reluctance](#). *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 27(3), 328–340. DOI:10.1037/law0000315

Little is known about the relation between law enforcement interviewing behaviors and commercially sexually exploited children's (CSEC) reluctance. This study examined the relation between officers' use of maximization, (references to) expertise, minimization, and support and adolescent CSEC victims' reluctance in a small sample of police interviews (n = 2,416 question-answer pairs across ten interviews). Twenty-six percent of officers' utterances contained at least one interviewing tactic. When statements were paired with maximization, they were correlated with more reluctance than when they were not paired with an interviewing tactic. Contrary to predictions, support was also related to greater reluctance. Open-ended (recall) questions and statements were associated with greater reluctance than closed-ended (recognition) questions. The results highlight the importance of understanding the context in which interviewing strategies are employed when assessing the relation between interviewer behavior and interviewee reluctance.

Tamm, A., Otzipka, J., & Volbert, R. (2021). [Assessing the individual interviewer rapport-building and supportive techniques of the R-NICHD protocol](#). *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 659438. DOI:10.3389/fpsyg.2021.659438

The use of the rapport-building and supportive techniques formulated by the R-NICHD protocol is intended to support children and increase the quality of their statements as well as disclosures without possessing suggestive potential. While the effectiveness of the entire R-NICHD protocol for children who have actually experienced child sexual abuse (CSA) has been supported by research, to date no study assessed the effect of each individual socio-emotional interview technique in both interviewees with and without CSA experiences. The current study aimed to address this gap in research by means of an online vignette-study, asking participants to rate the identified rapport-building and

supportive techniques on the scales well-being, willingness to talk, and perceived pressure. A total of 187 participants were randomly assigned to either a hypothetical “abused” or a hypothetical “not abused” group by means of a vignette-manipulation. The results suggest that many socio-emotional interview techniques were perceived as supportive and non-suggestive, while a number of techniques were perceived as not supportive but suggestive. Few differences emerged between the hypothetical “abused” group and the hypothetical “not abused” control group. To conclude, most but not all rapport-building and supportive techniques proposed by the R-NICHD protocol had a positive effect on interviewees.

Wallis, C. R., & Woodworth, M. (2021). Non-offending caregiver support in cases of child sexual abuse: An examination of the impact of support on formal disclosures. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 113, 104929. DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2021.104929

Childhood sexual abuse (CSA) is a highly prevalent issue, impacting a substantial number of children globally (12 %; Stoltenborgh et al., 2011). Past research has found many children who have been sexually abused will delay their disclosure until adulthood, if they disclose at all (McElvaney, 2015; Reitsema & Grietens, 2016). This is often likely because of the adverse impact that reporting abuse can have for the child and their families (especially when committed by an intrafamilial perpetrator). Non-offending caregiver support has evidenced promise in increasing rates of disclosure (Cyr et al., 2014). It was hypothesized that higher levels of caregiver support would result in shorter delays of disclosure and that less support is given when the abuser is closely related to the child. CSA cases (n = 164) were pulled from the RCMP database of reported crimes for the greater Okanagan Area, British Columbia, Canada and were coded for non-offending caregiver behaviors that indicated support and for relation to perpetrator. Higher levels of non-offending caregiver support were found to lead to shorter delays of disclosure. Non-offending caregivers were significantly less supportive when the abuser was more closely related. Caregiver support acted as a protective factor against delays of

disclosure. However, this support decreased significantly when the abuser was closely related. The current study provides evidence for the need to support caregivers of children who have been abused with educational programs and resources so they can properly support the child impacted.

Blasbalg, U., Hershkowitz, I., Lamb, M. E., & Karni-Visel, Y. (2020). Adherence to the Revised NICHD Protocol recommendations for conducting repeated supportive interviews is associated with the likelihood that children will allege abuse. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 27(2), 209–220. DOI:10.1037/law0000295

Because intensely reluctant children often fail to report being abused even when they are supportively interviewed, the Revised NICHD (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development) Protocol (RP) guides interviewers to delay discussion of sensitive topics and build rapport before scheduling a follow-up interview in which children might feel more comfortable. We sought to determine whether adherence to these recommendations was associated with the children's propensity to make allegations. Repeated forensic interviews were conducted with 202 Israeli children aged 3–14 who did not make allegations in the first interview, but of whom 104 made allegations during the second interview. The interviews were coded to identify interviewers' provision of support and types of substantive questions (invitations vs. closed-ended), as well as children's signs of reluctance, responsiveness, and informativeness. Interviewer behavior was represented with a latent variable reflecting the interviewers' expression of support, use of invitations, and the avoidance of closed-ended questions. Structural equation modeling (SEM) showed that adherence to the suggested interviewing model was positively associated with children being more likely to allege abuse (total effect: $\beta = .29$). This association was mediated by children's enhanced cooperativeness in the second interview (indirect effect: $\beta = .16$). These findings suggest that repeated interviews can be useful despite the additional financial costs.

Koçtürk, N., & Bilginer, S. Ç. (2020). Adolescent sexual abuse victims' levels of perceived social support and delayed disclosure. *Children and Youth Services Review, 118*, 105363. DOI:10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105363

Similar to disclosure rates, the timing of disclosure may also vary among sexual abuse (SA) victims. While some victims immediately disclose the SA, others may hide it until later in their adult lives. The main aims of this study were to not only compare the perceived social support levels of SA victims who disclosed the abuse immediately versus those who delayed doing so, but also evaluate the social reactions to these reports. This study comprised 116 victims who are aged between 15 and 18. The Perceived Social Support Scale was administered, and independent samples t-test analysis and the chi-square test was conducted for data analysis. We found no significant difference between victims who disclosed immediately and those who delayed the disclosure in terms of the perceived social support levels from families and the surrounding community. However, victims who first disclosed the SA to their family members have higher the perceived social support than victims disclosing the SA to other people. The most common reason for delayed disclosure was a fear of creating domestic problems. In addition, the victims who delayed disclosure experienced the most negative reactions from others. In the most negative reactions, victims who delayed disclosure were blamed for the SA and were labeled. The findings of the study may guide psychosocial interventions. Therefore, professionals working with children should interact with families and the community at large to encourage adolescent victims to disclose SA and approach these victims in a suitable way following the disclosure.

Ahern, E. C., Hershkowitz, I., Lamb, M. E., Blasbalg, U., & Karni-Visel, Y. (2019). Examining reluctance and emotional support in forensic interviews with child victims of substantiated physical abuse. *Applied Developmental Science, 23*(3), 227-238. DOI:10.1080/10888691.2017.1387057

Socio-emotional dynamics were examined in 230 forensic interviews of 3- to -13-year-old Israeli children who disclosed chronic physical abuse that could be substantiated.

Half of the children were interviewed using the Standard (SP) National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Protocol and the others using the Revised Protocol (RP) that emphasized emotional support from interviewers. When children disclosed physical abuse in the RP interviews, they did so in response to fewer prompts than children in the SP interviews. The number of turns in the transitional phase (during which the interviewer transitioned from rapport-building to exploring the possibility of abuse) was associated with increased directness and more specific utterance types. The younger children displayed reluctance more than older children. The RP interviews were characterized by more emotionally supportive statements throughout. These findings highlight various aspects of child forensic interviews that should be considered when seeking to understand children's willingness to engage with interviewers.

Almeida, T. S., Lamb, M. E., & Weisblatt, E. J. (2019). [Effects of delay, question type, and socioemotional support on episodic memory retrieval by children with autism spectrum disorder](#). *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, 49(3), 1111–1130. DOI:10.1007/s10803-018-3815-3

Twenty-seven autistic children and 32 typically developing (TD) peers were questioned about an experienced event after a two-week delay and again after a two-month delay, using the Revised National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Investigative Interview Protocol. Recall prompts elicited more detailed and more accurate responses from children than recognition prompts. Autistic children recalled fewer correct narrative details than TD peers when questioned using open invitations, cued invitations, and directive questions. Nonetheless, they were as accurate as TD peers when responding to all types of prompts. The informativeness and accuracy of children's reports remained unchanged over time. Social support was beneficial when children were interviewed for the first time but not after a longer delay.

Blasbalg, U., Hershkowitz, I., Lamb, M. E., Karni-Visel, Y., & Ahern, E. C. (2019). [Is interviewer support associated with the reduced reluctance and enhanced informativeness of alleged child abuse victims?](#) *Law and Human Behavior*, 43(2), 156–165.
DOI:10.1037/lhb0000303

Child maltreatment victims are often reluctant to report abuse when formally interviewed. Evidence-based guidelines like the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Standard Investigative Interview Protocol do not adequately address such reluctance because they are focused on cognitive rather than socioemotional strategies. The present study was designed to determine whether the Revised National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Protocol, which emphasizes supportive interviewing more than the standard protocol does, might predict increases in the overall informativeness and reductions in the reluctance of alleged victims. A total of 254 interviews, 166 using the revised protocol and 88 using the standard protocol, were conducted with 4.06- to 13.98-year-old children ($M = 9.20$, $SD = 2.49$) who disclosed multiple incidents of physical abuse by their parents and were thus expected to be more reluctant than victims of extrafamilial abuse. We coded indices of interviewer support and question types, children's reluctance, and informativeness in each utterance during the substantive phases of the interviews. The Revised Protocol was associated with better interviewer support and questioning as well as reduced reluctance and increased informativeness on the part of the children. These findings document the value of training interviewers to attend to the socioemotional needs of suspected abuse victims during investigative interviews.

Brattfjell, M. L., & Flåm, A. M. (2019). "They were the ones that saw me and listened." From child sexual abuse to disclosure: Adults' recalls of the process towards final disclosure. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 89, 225–236. DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2018.11.022

When child sexual abuse (CSA) is not disclosed, children run the risk of being subjected to longer or repeated abuse, not receiving necessary treatment, and being re-victimized. This study examines what adults exposed to child sexual abuse in hindsight evaluate as

important for disclosure. The aim was to explore exposed own experiences of steps towards final disclosure. Data were obtained from adult users of Norwegian Sexual Abuse Support Centers. Included were users exposed to CSA before the age of 18 (N=23). Data were collected through anonymous questionnaires at each support center. The material was transcribed and analyzed in the tradition of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The study illustrates a process towards disclosure as a dialogically anchored process evolving over time and along life-course inside encounters with important others towards whom the exposed pays attention, attunement, and adjustment whether to tell, delay, re-try, turn towards others, or actually disclose. Their experiences elucidate processes towards exploring and telling through direct and indirect hints and signs, decisions to tell, re-decisions and delaying, or withholding until adulthood, and the dependency on trusted confidants who ask and listen for final disclosure to occur. Thus, the present study sends an important message to exposed, confidants, and professionals when questions of CSA appear. That is to know of, facilitate, trust, and tolerate the dialogical dependency on being asked and heard by trusted persons and the many steps a process towards disclosure of CSA may entail in order to succeed.

Brubacher, S. P., Poole, D. A., Dickinson, J. J., La Rooy, D., Szojka, Z. A., & Powell, M. B. (2019). [Effects of interviewer familiarity and supportiveness on children's recall across repeated interviews](#). *Law and Human Behavior*, 43(6), 507–516.
DOI:10.1037/lhb0000346

Child witnesses often describe their experiences across multiple interviews. It is unknown whether talking with a familiar interviewer increases disclosures, however, or whether any benefits of a familiar interviewer could be achieved by ensuring that interviewers (regardless of familiarity) behave in socially supportive ways. This study tested the effects of interviewer familiarity and social support on children's reports of an adult's transgressions. We predicted that familiarity and supportiveness would increase transgression reports at a second interview and that children who spoke with familiar,

supportive interviewers would disclose the most transgressions. Children (N=160, 5 to 9 years) participated in a science event involving 6 transgressions. Across 2 interviews, they spoke with the same trained university student interviewer or different interviewers, and these interviewers engaged in supportive or neutral behaviors. Interviews were coded for overall information reported, number of transgressions, and confabulations. There were no effects of support in the first interview or on total details reported in either interview. Children reported more transgressions to supportive than neutral interviewers in the second interview (IRR=1.19), even during open-ended prompting (IRR=1.26), and they omitted fewer transgressions that had been reported in the first interview (IRR=0.69). Confabulations were infrequent. There were no condition differences in the total number of confabulations reported across interviews, but these errors occurred more often in the second interview in the supportive condition. Interviewer support may play a greater role than familiarity in facilitating children's testimony.

Eisen, M. L., Goodman, G. S., Diep, J., Lacsamana, M. T., Olomi, J., Goldfarb, D., & Quas, J. A. (2019). Effects of interviewer support on maltreated and at-risk children's memory and suggestibility. *International Journal on Child Maltreatment: Research, Policy and Practice*, 2(1), 55–78. DOI:10.1007/s42448-019-00016-7

The present study examined the effects of interviewer support on the memory and suggestibility of children (N = 71), all of whom were involved in child maltreatment investigations. This was accomplished by questioning 3- to 12-year olds (66% African American) about a game played individually with an experimenter at the end of the maltreatment investigation, so that the results did not affect any evaluations or legal proceedings. After the game, the children were interviewed in a warm and engaging high support manner or in a relatively formal and withdrawn low support fashion--the latter, likely considered by some as "neutral" in child forensic interviews. Typical age effects emerged overall; for example, with the preschool (compared to school-aged) children providing fewer correct units of information in free recall and making more errors to

specific and misleading questions. However, findings also varied in relation to interviewer support and type of question. To specific questions, older (but not younger) children in the low (compared to high) interviewer support condition made more omission errors, possibly due to the interviewer's low support resulting in a "no bias" for older children in answering these questions. To misleading questions, younger (but not older) children in the high (compared to low) support condition made significantly more commission errors. The elevated commission error rate in the high support group appeared to be driven by a small number of 3- and 4-year-olds who had a "yes-bias" when answering misleading questions. Implications for children's accuracy in maltreatment investigations and for children's psychological and physical security are discussed.

Saywitz, K. J., Wells, C. R., Larson, R. P., & Hobbs, S. D. (2019). Effects of interviewer support on children's memory and suggestibility: Systematic review and meta-analyses of experimental research. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*, 20(1), 22-39.
DOI:10.1177/1524838016683457

The accuracy of children's reports of abuse has been hotly debated in the press, academia, and the courtroom. Yet, children's accuracy depends, in part, on the context in which children are interviewed. Guidelines often recommend creating a supportive psychosocial context to promote open, honest responding; however, there is also concern that support promotes social desirability and acquiescence to suggestion, leading children to report more of what they perceive adults want to hear than the truth. The question remains as to whether there is a sufficient body of scientific research to determine whether interviewer supportiveness improves interview outcomes while minimizing children's stress or whether it increases suggestibility and impairs accuracy. Using a systematic search strategy and meta-analyses, this study identifies and reviews findings from experimental studies of the effects of interviewer supportiveness on the accuracy of children's reports. Although the number of studies in the evidence base is small ($n = 15$), the studies are of relatively good quality. Results suggest noncontingent interviewer support bolsters children's accuracy. Children are more resistant and less

acquiescent to suggestive questions when interviewers are supportive as compared to nonsupportive or neutral. Effects are in the moderate range. Interviewer support is also associated with fewer errors on nonsuggestive questions. Discussion focuses on implications for practice; directions for future research; identifying vulnerable subgroups; and underlying cognitive, social, and emotional mechanisms.

Ahern, E. C., VanMeter, F., & Lamb, M. E. (2018). A macro-coding perspective: Interviewer support and child comfort in investigative interviews with young, alleged victims of sexual abuse. *Children and Youth Services Review, 95*, 361-367.
DOI:10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.11.013

Macro-ratings of socio-emotional and cognitive qualities of interactions between children and forensic interviewers were examined in 95 interviews of 4- to-13-year-olds who disclosed sexual abuse. Lower quality interactions were more evident when children were recounting the abuse than during rapport-building or when children were discussing past disclosures. Older children expressed less discomfort and had more synchronous interactions with interviewers than younger children. The findings highlight room for improvement in the provision of cognitive and emotional support by forensic interviewers. The study showed the importance of considering multiple dimensions when assessing the socio-emotional and cognitive dynamics of forensic interviews and illustrated the value of macro-level coding.

Blasbalg, U., Hershkowitz, I., & Karni-Visel, Y. (2018). Support, reluctance, and production in child abuse investigative interviews. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law, 24*(4), 518-527. DOI:10.1037/law0000183

Child abuse victims are required to participate in stressful forensic investigations but often fail to fully report details about their victimization. Especially in intrafamilial abuse cases, children's emotional states presumably involve reluctance to report abuse. The current study examined the effects of interviewers' support on children's reluctance and

production of information when interviewed. The sample comprised 200 interviews of 6- to 14-year-old suspected victims of physical abuse perpetrated by a family member. Interviews followed the NICHD (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development) Revised Protocol (RP), which emphasizes supportive practices. All the cases were corroborated by external evidence, suggesting that the reports of abuse made by the children were valid. Coders identified instances of interviewer support and questioning, as well as indications of reluctance and the production of forensic details by the children. Expressions of reluctance predicted that information was less likely to be provided in that utterance, whereas expressions of support predicted less reluctance and increased informativeness in the following child utterance. Mediation analyses revealed that decreased reluctance partially mediated the effects of support on increased informativeness. The data indicate that support can effectively address children's reluctance, resulting in increased informativeness and thus confirming expert recommendations that supportive interviews should be considered best practice. The findings also shed light on the underlying mechanism of support, suggesting both direct and indirect effects on children's informativeness.

Hershkowitz, I., Ahern, E. C., Lamb, M. E., Blasbalg, U., Karni-Visel, Y., & Breitman, M. (2017). Changes in interviewers' use of supportive techniques during the Revised Protocol Training. *Applied Cognitive Psychology, 31*(3), 340-350.
DOI:10.1002/acp.3333

Although many children are reluctant to disclose abuse due to embarrassment, fear, and the anticipation of negative consequences, researchers have only recently begun to examine whether forensic interviewers can be trained to manage children's reluctance. In this study, the supportiveness of 53 experienced interviewers was assessed in their interviews with 321 3- to 14-year-old alleged victims, each conducted during the course of training to use the Revised Protocol (RP). The use of support increased, especially between levels evident at baseline and in the last two interviews assessed. Over time,

instances of inadequate support and insensitivity to children's reluctance became less common. Younger children received proportionally more support, including inadequate support, than older children. The RP training did not affect the extensive use of free recall-based questions. Findings highlight the benefits of continued supervision and training.

Waterhouse, G. (2016). [*Investigating the forensic interviewing of children: Multiple interviews and social support*](#) (Doctoral dissertation, London South Bank University).

Despite a burgeoning literature on the most effective ways to interview child victims/witnesses and resulting changes in interviewing guidelines in the UK, many children's cases still do not progress to court. The present thesis focuses on two underresearched aspects of interviewing that have the potential to improve children's informativeness and their willingness to support case progression; namely, multiple interviews and social support. Multiple interviewing entails formally interviewing a child more than once about an alleged event. Social support involves building rapport with a child to ease their anxieties about the interview. These techniques were addressed in four studies. The first comprised a survey of police officers and ascertained their opinions about and use of multiple interviews and social support. Officers reported conducting child interviews in a supportive manner. Their opinions of multiple interviewing were cautiously positive, including concerns over causing further distress to a child interviewee and the possibility that children might provide inconsistent details. The following studies addressed these risks. The second study analysed interviewer and interviewee behaviours in a real-life sample of multiple interview transcripts. The findings showed first, second, and third interviews to be conducted similarly in terms of the amount of support provided, and question types used. Children also provided many new details in second and third interviews, and very few contradictions of their previous testimony. The third study comprised an experiment examining the current UK police guidelines' rapport-building phase in multiple interviews with children. Again, children provided many new

details and few contradictions in multiple interviews, but there were no significant differences between the recall and well-being of children who had and had not experienced rapport building. The final study examined how multiple interviewing and viewing the rapport building phase of an interview affected mock-jurors' perceptions of a child witness, the interview, and the case. Multiple interviews resulted in more positive views of the child, whereas viewing the rapport-building led to more negative ones. Based on the previous chapters' positive findings regarding multiple interviewing, and some recent calls for the guidelines to be relaxed regarding the contexts in which multiple interviewing should be encouraged, a Study Space Analysis was conducted. However, this revealed that the literature is not yet sufficient for policy change to be enacted. In conclusion, multiple interviewing shows potential to be an effective way of obtaining additional, accurate information from children, but an alternative, more effective technique for building rapport with, and providing social support to children may need to be developed.

Lewy, J., Cyr, M., & Dion, J. (2015). Impact of interviewers' supportive comments and children's reluctance to cooperate during sexual abuse disclosure. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 43, 112-122. DOI:10.1016/j.chiabu.2015.03.002

In the field of child sexual abuse (CSA) disclosure, many studies have been conducted on the impact of interviewers' questioning style, but few have examined the impact of interviewers' supportive comments on children's cooperative and reluctant disclosure of substantive details. This field study used a sample of children ranging from 4 to 13 years of age who have all disclosed CSA. The first objective was to examine if the interviewer's and the child's comments during CSA interviews would vary as a function of the use of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) Protocol. The second objective was to identify the strongest correlates of the proportion of details disclosed by the children during forensic interviews. A total of 90 matched NICHD Protocol and non-Protocol interviews done by the same interviewers were audio-taped,

transcribed, and coded using verbal subscales. The goal was to explore if differences exist between the interviewers' supportive and non-supportive comments as well as children's cooperative and reluctant statements during investigative interviews conducted prior to or after the NICHD Protocol training. Results of a MANCOVA showed that the use of the NICHD Protocol had no influence on interviewers' and children's demeanors. A hierarchical multiple regression analysis controlling for relevant variables (e.g., child's age and NICHD Protocol) showed that children's reluctance and interviewers' non-support were associated with a lesser proportion of details. Overall, these results indicate that in order to promote detailed disclosure of CSA, interviewers should decrease their non-supportive comments and learn to deal more effectively with children's reluctance during forensic interviews. As such, protocols and training should encourage investigative interviewers to devote more time identifying early signs of children's verbal reluctance and to understand the negative impact of non-supportive comments on the disclosure of substantive details.

Ahern, E. C., Hershkowitz, I., Lamb, M. E., Blasbalg, U., & Winstanley, A. (2014). Support and reluctance in the pre-substantive phase of alleged child abuse victim investigative interviews: Revised versus Standard NICHD protocols. *Behavioral Sciences & the Law*, 32(6), 762-774. DOI:10.1002/bsl.2149

Children's unwillingness to report abuse places them at risk for re-victimization, and interviewers who do not respond sensitively to that unwillingness may increase the likelihood that victims will not disclose abuse. Interviewer support and children's reluctance were examined on a turn-by-turn basis using sequential analyses in 199 forensic interviews of 3- to 13-year-olds who alleged maltreatment. Half of the children were interviewed using the Revised Protocol that emphasized rapport-building (RP), the others using the Standard National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Protocol (SP). When using the RP, interviewers provided proportionally more support than when using the SP, but even when using the RP they did not specifically provide support

when children expressed reluctance. The RP promoted immediate cooperation when reluctant utterances were met with support, however, suggesting that supportive statements were valuable. The findings enhance our understanding of children's willingness to participate in investigative interviews and the means through which interviewers can foster the comfort and well-being of young witnesses.

Rush, E. B., Quas, J. A., Yim, I. S., Nikolayev, M., Clark, S. E., & Larson, R. P. (2014). Stress, interviewer support, and children's eyewitness identification accuracy. *Child Development, 85*(3), 1292-1305. DOI:10.1111/cdev.12177

Few studies have investigated how stress affects eyewitness identification capabilities across development, and no studies have investigated whether retrieval context in conjunction with stress affects accuracy. In this study, one hundred fifty-nine 7- to 8- and 12- to 14-year-olds completed a high- or low-stress laboratory protocol during which they interacted with a confederate. Two weeks later, they attempted to identify the confederate in a photographic lineup. The lineup administrator behaved in either a supportive or a nonsupportive manner. Participants who experienced the high-stress event and were questioned by a supportive interviewer were most accurate in rejecting target-absent lineups. Results have implications for debates about effects of stress on eyewitness recall, how best to elicit accurate identifications in children, and developmental changes in episodic mnemonic processes.

Lamb, M. E., Hershkowitz, I., & Lyon, T. D. (2013). [Interviewing victims and suspected victims who are reluctant to talk](#). *APSAC Advisor, 4*, 16-19.

Teoh, Y. S., & Lamb, M. (2013). Interviewer demeanor in forensic interviews of children. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 19(2), 145–159. DOI:10.1080/1068316X.2011.614610

Previous findings on the effects of interviewer support on the quality of children's accounts of experienced events are mixed, and little is known about other aspects of interviewer demeanor that might influence children's responses in an investigative interview. The present study examined the relations between child age and interviewer verbosity, support, and authoritarian manner, and how these relations predicted children's verbosity and informativeness in investigative interviews with alleged sexual abuse victims in Malaysia. Investigative interviews with 75 children aged between five and 15 years were coded for interviewer verbosity, supportive statements, authoritarian manner, child verbosity and children's informativeness. We found that the investigative interviewers in our study were more talkative but less supportive while interviewing the younger than older children. Further, interviewer verbosity was negatively associated with children's informativeness while interviewer support appeared to facilitate more informative accounts by the children. The interviewers' authoritarian manner did not vary with child age, nor did it correlate with the children's verbosity and informativeness. Our findings suggest that investigative interviewers should behave supportively at all times, but refrain from excessive talking in the interview.

Quas, J. A., Bauer, A., & Boyce, W. T. (2004). [Physiological reactivity, social support, and memory in early childhood](#). *Child Development*, 75(3), 797–814. DOI:10.1111/j.1467-8624.2004.00707.x

The interactive effects of physiological reactivity and social support on children's memory were examined. Four- to 6-year-olds completed a laboratory protocol during which autonomic responses and salivary cortisol were measured. Memory was assessed shortly afterward and 2 weeks later. During the second interview, children were questioned by a supportive or nonsupportive interviewer. Few significant relations emerged between reactivity and children's short-term memory. Following a 2-week delay, cortisol reactivity

was associated with poorer memory and autonomic reactivity was associated with increased accuracy among children questioned in a supportive manner but decreased accuracy among children questioned in a nonsupportive manner. Results question traditional conceptualizations of reactivity as a risk factor and instead suggest that reactivity may only confer risk in certain environmental contexts.

Almerigogna, J., Ost, J., Bull, R., & Akehurst, L. (2007). [A state of high anxiety: How non supportive interviewers can increase the suggestibility of child witnesses](#). *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 21(7), 963–974. DOI:10.1002/acp.1311

The present study examined the effects of state and trait anxiety on 8–11 years old children's susceptibility to misleading post-event information. Participants' state and trait anxiety were measured, after which they watched an extract from a children's movie. They were then individually interviewed using either a supportive or a non-supportive style. During the interviews, the children were asked 14 questions about the movie, seven of which were control and seven contained misleading information. After the interview, their state anxiety was measured again. Results showed that participants interviewed in a non-supportive style were more likely to provide incorrect answers to misleading questions. Furthermore, participants who scored highly on both trait and post-interview state anxiety measures more often responded incorrectly to misleading questions. Also, pre-to post-interview changes in state anxiety were correlated with more incorrect responses to misleading questions.

Davis, S. L., & Bottoms, B. L. (2002). Effects of social support on children's eyewitness reports: A test of the underlying mechanism. *Law and Human Behavior*, 26(2), 185–215. DOI:10.1023/A:1014692009941

Research on children's eyewitness testimony demonstrates that interviewer-provided social support given during a mock forensic interview helps children resist an interviewer's

misleading suggestions about past events. We proposed and tested 1 potential mechanism underlying support effects: "Resistance Efficacy," or children's perceived self-efficacy for resisting an interviewer's suggestions. Eighty-one 6- and 7-year-old children experienced a play event, then were interviewed about the event with misleading and specific questions. Consistent with prior research, children interviewed by a supportive person were more resistant to misleading suggestions than were those interviewed by a nonsupportive person. Although Resistance Efficacy did not mediate the effects of interviewer support in the full sample, additional analyses revealed that Resistance Efficacy may be a mediator for older, but not younger, children. Contrary to predictions, children's preexisting social support reserves were not related to children's interview accuracy nor to perceived Resistance Efficacy. Implications for psychological theory are discussed, as well as implications for understanding and improving children's eyewitness reports.